



To: Members of the Transportation Committee

From: Elisa Velardo, Executive Director, Vinfen CT

Re: Opposition to CT DMV Regulation 14-275c – Transportation of Students Receiving Vocational/Transitional Services

Date: February 9, 2015

My name is Elisa Velardo and I am the Executive Director of Vinfen CT -- a private nonprofit agency located in Windsor CT. Our agency has been in operation for 15 years and provides individualized vocational and residential supports and services for people with intellectual and psychiatric disabilities. I am writing to inform you of Vinfen CT's opposition to newly enforced DMV regulations for transition education providers' student transportation operators and student transportation vehicles, in the hope that steps can be taken by agencies and legislators to rectify current mandates.

In late July 2014, our agency received an email from the State DOE stating regulations which must be followed when transporting students who have an IEP. One regulation mandates that any vehicles used in transporting these students must be marked with large yellow "CARRYING SCHOOL CHILDREN" signs on the top of vehicles and large placards on the sides and rear of vehicles identifying the provider agency. Our vehicles are used for students who are 18 and over who are choosing to stay in school to get transition education services to prepare them for jobs. Utilizing vehicles with such signage causes undue stigmatization of these young adults. Vinfen also feels that this does a disservice to these students as well as the other individuals already in our program. To have vehicles identified as "carrying school children" stigmatizes other adults that would be riding in the vehicle as well as the student. Further, our program is intentionally designed to move students away from the school environment and into the adult environment. Technically, age 18 is considered an adult, and we strive to treat them as such.

In addition, as part of Vinfen's vocational transition program, young adults are transported to employment sites for interviews. Arriving in "school" marked vehicles announces to potential employers that transition education students are different, are considered children, and does not support the notion of a capable potential employee.

Another aspect of the DOE regulations concerns the special operator endorsements, insurance, training, and registration requirements. This causes additional financial expenses and adds a staffing burden to our program as only specially licensed drivers will be able to transport these students. We feel these regulations are unnecessary because they mirror many of the measures Vinfen takes during the hiring process for staff.



Adherence to this unfunded mandate imposes thousands of dollars to implement and comply. It squeezes us and other nonprofit agencies who are already struggling due to state funding reductions. Provider agencies like Vinfen are already strictly regulated by CT funding agencies to ensure that we provide nothing but the best of care to the individuals we serve. It is our belief that these signs have little public safety value and serve to differentiate transition education students from other students and employees in the workplace, thus, taking us away from the mission and philosophy of our agency to treat people with intellectual disabilities with the same respect and opportunities that we all enjoy.

Submitted by,

Elisa Velardo
Executive Director,
Vinfen CT